



FIRST PERSON

Returnees Recover Lost “Identities” Close to Home

Mobile clinics providing replacements of crucial documents facilitate voter registration



Displaced Sri Lankan citizens apply for replacement identity documents at a USAID-funded mobile clinic. *Photo: International Foundation for Electoral Systems*

“I can now exercise my rights as a civilian and a voter and participate in the country’s democratic development.”

C. Elilmegawarnan gazed happily at her new temporary identity card, scarcely believing that she had received it within a week of applying.

Elilmegawarnan is one of the thousands of residents in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka who lost their identity and legal documents because of multiple displacements during the country’s 26-year civil conflict.

She lives in a village some 30 kilometers from the nearest Divisional Secretariat (DS), which issues such documents. Getting there would require a long bus ride, and the office accepts applications only once a week. Elilmegawarnan was intimidated by the time and money needed to get her documents reissued.

Then she heard about the USAID-funded mobile clinic for issuing documents, set up in her own village. The mobile clinics have helped some 170,000 residents island-wide obtain copies of essential identity documents, such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, and national identity cards, some of which are mandatory for voter registration.

“I lost many of my belongings during the conflict, including all my identity documents. I never thought I could get them reissued this quickly without spending any money or travelling several times to the DS Office,” said a relieved Elilmegawarnan.

The mobile clinics were part of a project called *Strengthening the Capacity of Domestic Election Monitoring Organizations*, funded by USAID’s Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance through its Elections and Political Processes Fund.

Along with helping people recover their identity documents, the project also strengthened the capacity of local organizations to conduct voter registration programs and provided technical assistance to election officials.

Telling Our Story

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